

Humanities Foundation a rare jewel for education

By GREGORY G. FITCH

In the words of Winston Churchill, "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

Certainly, the giving is in the proof of the many teachers and students who have benefited from the School and University Partners for Educational Renewal teacher program.

For almost 20 years, the Alabama Humanities Foundation has made this program available at no charge to fourth-through 12th-grade public and private school teachers, school librarians and administrators who wish to expand and deepen their knowledge of a particular subject or theme within the humanities.

According to AHF Programs Director Thomas Bryant, annually, an average of more than 300 educators of the humanities, social sciences and arts participate in this graduate-level, multidisciplinary program, the content of which is taken back to an estimated 45,000 students in classrooms across Alabama. Since 1991, SUPER has served nearly 3,700 teachers and 500,000 students.

The topics are varied and fascinating. Recent topics include, among others, French and Spanish language training, studying human rights issues that deal with immigration policies, gender and economic issues, genocide and poverty and protest art in the United States and Europe; history and culture of China, Japan and Korea; history and culture of Mobile and Alabama's Gulf Coast.

Many educators benefited from the two-part study of Alabama's Black Belt, "Prisms of Place." In the words of one teacher, "Hearing firsthand from historians that lived the Black Belt history, seeing artists who created and entertained with Black Belt products, visiting places that tempted all my senses, and learning from some of Alabama's leading scholars has been amazing."

The content in all of these programs directly addresses the courses of study as mandated by the state Department of Edu-

cation.

These intensive workshops include extensive pre-institute readings, discussions, lectures, writing exercises, field trips and cultural experiences that foster relationships between Alabama's institutions of higher education, public and private elementary and secondary schools, and the state's many important historical and cultural organizations.

I constantly receive letters of thanks to the Commission on Higher Education for the financial support given to the program. Recently, a new teacher wrote me saying that the resources she gained from SUPER are invaluable and that she has learned such a program for teachers is rare.

Indeed it is a rare jewel in Alabama's educational system that brings together elementary, secondary and postsecondary teachers and university faculty all wanting to learn more to expand their knowledge and, therefore, their effectiveness in the classroom.

Another teacher attending a World War II SUPER teacher workshop said she met a 98-year-old veteran artist. In her words, each workshop has improved her teaching and reaching of her students with a multidisciplinary approach. She added that no other workshop makes scholars, experts and resources so available.

I applaud these educators who unselfishly give of their time to participate in SUPER and enthusiastically share their newfound knowledge with students. It is a successful program that Alabama can be proud of supporting and will pay major dividends for generations.

Gregory G. Fitch is executive director of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education. Website: www.ache.state.al.us. For more information and to apply to the Alabama Humanities SUPER program, visit that website at www.AHF.net.